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Koch Tells of F.B.I. Visit in Weinberger Case

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

Mayor Koch said yesterday that agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation came to City Hall last week seeking to learn his source for a translation of a Lebanese newspaper article that sparked a long-running dispute with Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger.

The agents were not told the source of the translation, which was of an account of a Weinberger meeting with a high Saudi official. But yesterday, in a letter to William H. Webster, Director of the F.B.I., Mr. Koch said it was the Israeli consul general in New York, Naftali Lavie. Mr. Koch had previously denied that the Israeli Government was the source.

In his letter, the Mayor also suggested that Mr. Weinberger was behind the F.B.I. inquiry and that it was really an attempt "to use the F.B.I. to stifle my constitutional rights to comment upon matters of national policy."

Roger Young, an assistant director and the chief spokesman for the F.B.I., said on Mr. Webster's behalf that the bureau was conducting an inquiry. But he added: "There is no investigation of Mayor Koch. In fact, Mayor Koch has been assisting us in the matter. That's why we've been talking to him. He's not under investigation."

'We Believe It Was'

Michael Burch, assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, speaking for Mr. Weinberger, said, "The suggestion that Mr. Weinberger would initiate an investigation against Mayor Koch is absurd."

William Raugh, Mr. Koch's press secretary, acknowledged later that it was unclear who had requested the inquiry.

"We do not, in fact, know that the investigation was instigated by Weinberger," Mr. Raugh said. "But we believe it was."

A Federal official said, however, that the request for the F.B.I. inquiry had come from the State Department as part of its recently stepped-up effort to analyze and counteract the growing phenomenon of disinformation.

Disinformation — the planting of false stories in the foreign press to damage a nation in the eyes of readers abroad — has become an increasingly

troublesome propaganda problem, according to officials of the State Department and the United States Information Agency.

According to American intelligence officials, the false stories, many planted by the Soviet Union or its allies, are sometimes bizarre, obviously concocted and easily seen for what they are. Others, however, are skillful blends of fact and fiction with the ring of truth.

By Mr. Weinberger's account, it was an obviously fabricated account of an actual event — a meeting between Secretary Weinberger and Saudi Arabia's Defense Minister, Sultan Ben Abdel el Aziz, on May 12 in Paris — that led to the Mayor's original complaint. The article appeared in the Beirut newspaper Al Safir, Lebanon's second-largest daily, last July 17, and purported to be a transcription of the meeting.

In the English translation of the transcription that Mr. Koch now says came from the Israeli consul general, Mr. Weinberger was quoted as having said that President Reagan had not been informed of a Saudi request for American jet fighters because "it would be leaked to Congress and the press."

Among other things, the translation also quoted Mr. Weinberger as having said that the Saudis were being offered advanced American tanks that were "not in the hands of the American Army even."

On Aug. 17, the Mayor wrote to Mr. Weinberger, enclosing a copy of the translation and expressing shock. He allowed that the transcript might be a forgery and urged Mr. Weinberger to say so publicly if that was the case.

Mr. Weinberger, in a response Aug. 25, said "this so-called transcript is a complete fabrication and a very crude attempt at disinformation."

Further Correspondence

The matter did not end there, however. Mr. Koch wrote again on Sept. 1 and urged Mr. Weinberger to make a public denial and demand that Al Safir print a retraction "to maintain America's credibility with our allies."

The Mayor got no answer and wrote again on Sept. 14 and Oct. 7. He also wrote to, and received answers from, dozens of United States senators and representatives, some of whom also wrote to Mr. Weinberger.

Finally, in a reply written Sept. 20, and, according to the Mayor, received at City Hall on Oct. 19, Mr. Weinberger said it was the policy of the Administration "not to reveal details of classified diplomatic exchanges."

Mr. Weinberger said he stood by his statement that the transcript article was a fabrication and called Mr. Koch's letters "a clumsy effort to make political capital out of these lies." Mr. Koch, in a final letter Oct. 20, continued to press the Secretary for a public statement.

'Over the Transom'

The Koch-Weinberger letters, provided by Mr. Koch, were printed in The New York Times on Nov. 9. A few days later, as the controversy over the exchange continued to draw public attention, Mr. Koch was asked by a reporter how he had got the translation of the article.

"It came in over the transom," Mr. Koch replied. "I didn't see the arm pitching it over."

Asked whether it had been conveyed by the Israeli Government, he said: "Not true."

Yesterday, in his letter to Mr. Webster, Mr. Koch said that on Dec. 5 he learned from Al Safir's correspondent in Washington that he was the subject of a Federal investigation on "how I had obtained the translation."

That same day, the Mayor said, his office got a call from Kenneth P. Walton, deputy director of the F.B.I. in New York, who told Mr. Koch's counsel, Patrick F. X. Mulhearn, that an inquiry had been initiated. Two days later, Mr. Koch said, F.B.I. agents went to City Hall.

He said that the agents told Mr. Mulhearn that the inquiry focused on issues of "espionage" and "disinformation," and that they "repeated the request for a statement from me as to the source of the translation."

Mr. Raugh, the Mayor's press secretary, said yesterday that the agents were not told the source at that time. But in his letter, Mr. Koch said it was Mr. Lavie.